DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 273 050 EA 018 797

AUTHOR Lamborn, Robert L.
TITLE Public and Private School Perspectives on Educational Reform.
PUB DATE 31 Mar 86
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Catholic Educational Association (Anaheim, CA, March 31-April 3, 1986).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cooperation; *Educational Change; Educational History; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Private Education; *Public Education; *Public Policy

ABSTRACT

This paper considers factors contributing to the perspectives on educational reform held by educators in the public and private school systems of the United States and suggests a common perspective that can be used by both parties. The paper first defends four assertions: (1) the perspectives of those debating the appropriate roles of public and private education are distorted by ignorance, misinformation, bias, and emotion; (2) this distortion of policy perspectives handicaps educators trying to serve the public; (3) differences in public and private perspectives derive more from differences in "ownership," "mission," and "perception" than from differences in philosophy, purposes, or programs; and (4) the significant common core of purposes and concerns shared by public and private education provides sufficient ground for major collaborative efforts toward educational reform. The paper then reviews the fragmentation of education into varied public and private systems and the current movement toward increasing collaboration. A rationale for collaborative effort is proposed based on meeting common needs within a pluralistic society. The paper concludes by urging further scrutiny of the proposal, a long-term promotional effort, coordinated study, development of a national plan for collaborative reform, and conscientious pursuit and modification of that plan. (PGD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED273050

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Robert L. Lamborn

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOL PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Robert L. Lamborn
UCLA Graduate School
of Education
Marina del Rey, CA

Presented March 31, 1986 at the Annual Meeting of the National Catholic Educational Association (Anaheim, CA, March 31-April 3).

EA 018 797

ROBERT L. LAMBORN
PRESENTED NCEA
3/31/84

Public and Private School Perspectives on Educational Reform

I have been asked to talk with you about "Public and Private School Perspectives on Educational Reform." I am happy to -- but I must point out the obvious: what you will be hearing is, of necessity, my perspective on public and private school perspectives on educational reform. It may well be that my perspective on the public school perspective will seem inadequate to some public school people. And, speaking in-house, it is almost certain that my perspective on the private school perspective will seem inadequate to some private school people. I see the educational scene, necessarily, through the filter of my background. This is obvious--and not necessarily bad--but it is a fact I want to acknowledge at the outset. In my remarks today, I intend:

(1) to make and consider at some length four central points relating to factors which I believe bear importantly on the perceptions which underlie the formulation of American public policy with regard to education and the perspectives which public and private school people bring to the consideration of proposals for educational reform;

(2) to suggest, rather briefly, how we come to find ourselves where we are on these matters;

(3) to urge the consideration of what I find to be an historically based, descriptively accurate, and conceptually cohesive--if uncommon--perspective on educational reform; and

(4) to outline a proposed agenda for increasing the effectiveness of our efforts to mobilize and utlized the resouces available for the support of the nations' educational efforts.

Put in broader terms, I intend:

(1) to consider several significant factors contributing to the formation and character of existing public and private school perspectives on educational reform;

(2) to indicate the major differences in those perspectives;

(3) to urge a particular perspective and approach;

(4) and to propose, in outline, an agenda for that approach.

I should, at the outset, make clear that by "private schools" I mean all of the non-governmental or non-public schools--all the schools other than the public.

Point 1. The perspectives of the principals in much of the public policy discussion concerning the roles of public and private schools in American education and society are--to a greater or lesser degree--distorted by ignorance, misinformation, implicit or explicit biases, presumptions, myths, and emotions.

The fact is that there is a great deal, particularly about the private schools, that we just don't know. And we know even less about the relationships between public and private schools and between the schools and the communities they serve.

It wasn't until the early to middle 1970's that we began to develop simple descriptive information about the private schools--the number of schools, the number of students, the number of teachers, and the general nature of their programs. The National Catholic Educational Association and the Council for American Private Education worked with the National Center for Education Statistics for three years to develop a decent (but still incomplete) list of private schools during that period. Continuing effort during the intervening decade has steadily improved this list and made it posible to produce a better data base on private schools. It wasn't until the middle to late 1970's that the American Educational Research Association's Special Interest Group, Associates for Research on Private Education, was created and there was a marked increase in the scholarly consideration of the educational processes in private schools.

How well informed do you think people are about private schools: the general public; the media; the legislators (local, state, and national); the education organizations and agencies; the faculty members at schools of education; the teachers and administrators in public schools; or, even, those who spend their lives in private schools? How many know how many private schools there are; how many children they serve; how many teachers they employ; or how these figures on schools, students, and teachers compare with parallel figures for public schools? How many know where the private schools are located? How many know how much money private schools create annually for the support of American education; or how the total compares with the total funds allocated to elementary and secondary education by the federal government? How many know to what extent they serve minorities; or how they are distributed among rural, suburban, and inner-city communities? How many know how many national private school organizations there are; what characteristics distinquish these groups of schools from each other; how much variation exists within these subsets of private schools?

This is simple, basic, information about private schools. It doesn't even begin to address the central questions which relate to educational excellence: the set of philosophical and ideological value sysems which direct the development and implementation of educational programs; the programs offered and their distinquishing characteristics; the professional training and competence of the teachers and administrators; and the matters of institutional organization and procedure which may be related to outcome.

Much more descriptive information is available on public schools than on private--and much more scholarly attention has been directed at matters of educational philosophy, educational programs, professional training and competence, and institutional organization and management in public schools than in private. But relatively few of the findings are universal and definitive. It seems clear as one reads the recent flurry of studies and reports that there is still a good deal of "arm-chairing" going on. Perhaps that is the best one can do at this

point, but it needs to be recognized for what it is. And one needs merely to read and listen to comments about the public schools and then visit the schools to see that while the schools do face major problems there are often significant differences between the public perceptions and the facts.

Perhaps the fuzziness of the perspectives of the general public, the media, the legislators, and the professional educators on these matters is typified by two recurrent assumptions: first, that because the public schools serve "all the children" each the public school is a democratic institution--i.e., has a student body which is broadly representative of the general population; and, second, that because a small percentage of the private schools severely restrict their student-bodies in one way or another at admission private schools as a group are elitist. Such assumptions fail to acknowledge the patent diversity in both the public and private schools--a fact which is immediately evident on the most cursory investigation.

We have made at least a start at developing basic descriptive information about schools--relatively thorough in the case of public schools, rudimentary but promising in the private schools. Pursued, these investigations should improve the understanding of the character, condition, and contributions of both the pubic and the private schools. It should also improve opportunities for public and private schools to benefit from the identification of procedures which are transportable.

But there is no substantial body of research relating to two of the of the more difficult matters under debate. First, although it has been the subject of extended debate, there has been little scholarly attention given to determining the interrelationships betweeen public and private schools when they serve the same community. You know the lines of argument--I'll not burden you with them again. At their most extreme, these arguments are diametrically opposed. In debate, unsupported assumptions are often presented as fact and argued with great fervor. In fact--to my best knowledge--many of the central arguments advanced in public debate are little more than firmly believed but unsubstantiated myths. We just don't know, for example, whether public schools benefit from "competition" with good private schools or are severely handicapped by the presence of good private schools in the communities they serve.

There has been somewhat less debate on the second issue, and I know of no research, but it is of central importance to a thorough consideration of educational reform. Is the quality of life in a community changed in one way or another as a direct result of having both public and private schools in the community? Are personal tensions eased or intensified as a result of educational choice? Are such communities more or less stable? Does the presence of educational options tend to increase or decrease the conflicts between diverse elements of the community? To the extent any current debate focuses on these issues, it can be addressed only out of personal observation and judgment, wise and balanced in some cases, quite the opposit in others.

Point 2. To the extent that their perspectives are distorted by ignorance, misinformation, implicit or explicit biases, presumptions, myths, and emotions, those involved in developing and implementing public policy with regard to the roles of public and private schools in American education and society are handicapped in their efforts to serve the public need as well as they might wish.

I hope you will excuse a personal aside to lend authority to my position. I've spent a life-time in preparing for or in pursuing a career in school administration. From the outset, I have worked closely with leading public schools educators, as well as leaders in private schools. I've been active in a wide range of professional organizations, public and private. I've studied in five schools of education; been on the faculties of three. As Executive Director of the Council for American Private Education, I was simultaneously the employee of 15 national organizations of private schools, representing them before professional and governmental bodies on all levels, and with the national media. It is safe, and accurate, to say I have been totally and consciously immersed in school administration for 60 years or more. That's a fair period of time. I've had, I expect, as broad and constant an exposure to practitioners at all levels, faculty members at schools of education, scholars, staff members of professional organizations, local, state, and federal legislators, governmental agencies, and the media as all but a few in the profession.

Acknowledging with deep appreciation the outstanding vision and wisdom of many with whom I have worked over the years--and there have been many--I am convinced that such distortions of perspective as I have suggested are widespread in the field, that they seriously impede efforts at educational uniform, and that they critically limit the nation's ability to serve the public need. The results are evident at all levels--in scholarship, in professional preparation and in-service activities, in school operations, in the making and implementation of public policy, in the media's interpretation of educational developments, and in the perceptions of the general public. Heated public policy debates based on limited information and understanding result in unenlightened public policy, the inefficient use of limited resources, distructive relationships between those whose best collaborative thought is needed to meet the nation's educational needs, and, ultimately, to a national near inability to constructively address the broad and complicated set of issues related to planning for the improvement of the operation of the nation's educational establishment. At the same time, uninformed scholarship and professional preparation lead to the creation of professional cadres in public and private education whose members hold points of view which are almost equally distructive of collaborative thought and the most constructive use of available resources. The costs to the public are enormous.

So much for ignorance, misinformation, implicit or explicit biases, presumptions, myths, and emotions. They exist, they distort perceptions and perspectives, they exact a high cost on public policy formation and implementation, they need to be acknowledged at the outset.

Point 3. There are distinct differences in the perspectives of public and private schools toward educational reform but these derive more from differences in "ownership," "mission," and "perception," than from differences in educational philosophy, purposes, or programs.

In preparing for today's discussion, I looked through Who Will Teach Our Children, the report, after a two-year study, of the California Commission on the Teaching Profession, and discussed it with a group of public school teachers and administrators. I talked with a long-time California Superintendent of Schools about the public school perspective on educational reform. I looked over your preliminary program for this convention. I ran over the program for a recent meeting of the California Association of Independent Schools. I studied my notes on a recent Catholic University-hosted conference on the status of research on private education.

I was looking for differences in the perspectives of public and private school people. What I found made sense, and confirmed what I have believed for a long time. The differences in the perspectives of public and private schools toward educational reform are not primarily a function of different professional purposes or concerns. Public and private schools, after all, have much the same purposes, serve much the same children and families, provide much the same programs in much the same manner in plants which are often interchangeable. They deal with many of the same problems, face many of the same frustations, find satisfactions in much the same accomplishments. In these areas the perspectives of the public and private sectors toward educational reform have much in common--shared interests, for example, in upgrading professional skills, in undertaking curricular reforms, in developing techniques for the more effective use of advanced technologies, in modifying management procedures, and in serving their students and communities better.

The actual differences in perspective are primarily a function of public vs. private ownership, of the different demands which are put on the schools, and of the different perceptions public and private school people have of their institutions and their social roles. The major differences are these:

(1) The public schools are controlled, directly or indirectly, from three levels and from three distances--local, state, and national, with a resulting set of near-paralyzing demands for programs, reports, and accounting without a clear understanding of local needs or capabilities. Even in the largest private school systems, the lines of authority are much more clearly defined and the seats of authority much more accessible--and, in many cases, the control is very close at hand indeed.

The public schools, quite appropriately, direct a good deal of their attention to matters related to governmental control, administrative procedures on the system and higher levels, and similar matters. The private schools direct more of their attention to management at the school level.

(2) Public school funding is from governmental sources and is complicated by evolving tax laws and state and federal mandates and financing, as well as by the mandated responsibility to handle funding for private school student participation in certain publicly funded programs. Private schools, on the other hand, raise the bulk of their funds through private channels of one type or another, while striving in the face of major constraints to have their students participate equitably in publicly funded special programs.

Public schools are eager to find ways to bring their chaotic financial situation under control. Private schools are studying more effective ways to raise funds from private sources. And, obviously, the public and private school perspectives on providing for the participation of private school students in special publicly funded programs are different.

(3) Public schools are increasingly required to provide programs which accommodate extraordinarily diverse sets of value standards and to avoid the appearance of imposing a particular set of standards, especially those which appear in any way to the religiously based. The private schools, on the other hand, are free--are virtually required for survival--to have clear and focused values standards which they announce and enforce. And they are entirely free to promote religion as a integrated or separate part of their programs.

Public educators, therefore, are concerned with developing policies or procedures or techniques which will help them in dealing with a threatened vacuum in school value standards. Private schools are searching for ways to do "their thing" more effectively.

(4) The public schools came out of the protest period of the 1970's with what Arthur Powell and his associates have dubbed "The Shopping Mall High School"--a school of unlimited opportunity for choice but a limited requirement for organized sequential study or solid academic achievement. The private schools remained, for the most part, more traditionally focused during this period--their programs didn't proliferate as much as those of the public schools and "push," to use Powell's term, does not have to be reestablished to the same degree as in the public schools.

The public schools are searching for a way back to their earlier standards of performance. The private schools are, by comparison, concentrating more on improving and modernizing programs rather searching for a way back to earlier levels of performance.

(5) And then there are the differences in prespective which grow out of differences in perception--and these are, in my judgment, of major significance. In more cases than not, public and private school people see themselves as quite different people, with quite different social functions in quite different school settings. Seeing themselves and their schools as so markedly different, they tend, on occasion, to view matters of educational reform relating to professional preparation, curricular design, teaching methods, administrative organization, and related matters as necessarily unsuitable to the private sector if suitable to the public--and vice versa. Justifiable or not, this perception of difference creates a very real difference in the public and private school perspectives toward educational reform and needs to the noted and dealt with.

So, we have differences in perspective which grow out of ignorance, misinformation, and those other nasty things I mentioned earlier. And we have differences in perspectives which reflect differences in "ownership" and "mission." And we have, finally, differences of perspective which grow out of differences in self-perceptions nurtured by society and the profession. There remains a large common core of shared purposes and concerns which need to be acknowledged and addressed. And that leads me to conclude this portion of my remarks by making, with only minimal elaboration, the last of my four points about the formulation of public policy as it relates to the roles of public and private schools in American education and society.

Point 4. The common core of purposes and concerns shared by the public and private schools provides the grounds for a major joint collaborative effort to promote school reform in the areas of teaching methods, curriculum reform, the use of advanced technologies, and management procedures, among others.

I really don't believe that this point requires much in the way of explanation or support. I am quite prepared is hold forth vigorously--and, if pressed, at some length--on my grounds for believing that the common or transportable elements in public and private school operation approach or exceed 90% of the whole. This is a much greater percentage than many of my private school friends--or of my public schools friends, for that matter--would credit. But I won't go into these arguments about the size of the common core. It is enough to acknowledge that it exists and that it is substantial.

There was a time, of course, in the history of American education when there were no significant distinctions between public and private schools such as there are now. The shift in many ways seems too bad. Once a school was a school. What happened on the way to the 21st century?

At the outset, of course, the colonists felt they needed schools, funded them any way they could, and weren't much concerned about whether those funds were public or private. The nation's first two schools, Colligiate (founded in New York City about 1627) and Boston Latin (founded in Boston in 1635) are good examples. Each was created by the public to fill a public need. Colligiate exists today as the oldest private school; Boston Latin, as the oldest public school. No such distinction was made when they were established--and it didn't really become important until the Jeffersonian mandate led to the move to establish "public" schools in New York City in the early 1600's as a protest against the elite nature of the colonial schools, public and private.

Since then, the story of American eduction has been one of fragmentation and often heated confrontation. The Catholic schools rose in response to what Catholics saw as the prevailing Protestant character of the public schools; the Lutheran schools, to protect an ethnic and religous heritage; the Hebrew day schools, to reestablish their commitment to their faith; the Christian schools, to protest the de-Protestantizing of the public schools. And the schools of many other smaller groups have been established for a variety of reasons. Separateness caused problems and tensions between the public and private sectors, as did the related perceptions and animosities growing out of the court cases of the 1920's, the egalitarian boom in the public schools starting about 1915, the Depression, and the more recent public policy battles with regard to intergration, student participation in publicly funded programs, tax policy, vouchers, and tuition tax credits.

During this period of fragmentation and escalating confrontations, there emerged what I see as a major countervailing trend--a trend toward collaboration. It was evident, first, within the subsets of private schools and then between the subsets, leading to the creation and growth of the Council for American Private Education. Then, in limitied but encouraging ways, it began to evidence itself in the evolving relationships between the public and private school members of professional organizations, between scholars with established interests in the public and private schools, and within the faculties of schools of education in both public and private universities.

In this regard, it seems most encouraging to me, for example, that the Graduate School of Education at UCLA, considered to be the nation's leading public research institution in the field, invited me four years ago to join the faculty to help them in their efforts to see that their courses, programs, research agenda, recruiting, student and career services adequately reflected the role of private schools (K-12) in American education and society; that the School's specialization in Administrative and Policy Studies in Education has appointed a standing Private School Advisory Committee drawing together representatives of major private schools groups (Msgr. John Mihan, I'm happy to say, accepted an invitation to be a charter member of the group and has contributed mightily to its deliberations); and, further, that the School is now officially co-sponsoring with Associates for Research on Private Education the publication of Private School Monitor, which is edited by Prof. Donald Erickson of the faculty.

This sort of calloborative undertaking at such an institution holds great promise, it seems to me, for creating a climate in which people of good faith in public and private schools may join scholars and teaching faculties in schools of education, as well as staff members of professional organizations and legislators and government agency officials in efforts to consider together how the nation's available education resources can best be used to serve the public welfare.

It is particularly fortunate, in my judgment, that this long-time trend toward thoughtful collaboration should have reached this point at a time when the nation has been made aware, by a series of major studies and a great deal of political and media attention, of the major problems in American education and of the limited resources which are available for their solution. And it is fortunate that all of this occurs at a time when there is an increasing public perception that the public needs may in some cases be met as well--perhaps even better--by private means than by governmental means. There are even indications, too, that after the emotional intensity of three decades of public policy confrontations over private school related issues there may be some tendency to replace some of the passion with calmer consideration--but that's just a possibility. Don't count on it!

However uncertain I am about this last point, I am entirely satisfied that we have today an unparalleled opportunity to make a major advance in the perspective from which we as a nation--all of us in our several roles--can approach educational reform. We can look to our historical roots and embrace again the educational wisdom of the colonists. We can attribute to them a basic wisdom with regard to educational matters which we regularly attribute to the framers of the Constitution. We can say they had the right idea; it just needs to be updated.

The New York colonists felt a public need and created the Collegiate School. The Boston colonists felt a parallel public need and created the Boston Latin School. And they chipped in to pay the costs of providing for the public welfare--in one case through predominantly private means and in the other through predominantly public means. And they judged the worth of the schools by the public service they performed, not by how they were paid for. They recognized that the public value of the institutions was not related to the source of their funds but to their contributions to the public welfare. It is time for us to do the same thing.

The national interest--and, incidentally, the interests of the public and private schools--would be best served, I am convinced, if our underlying concept with regard to our schools would follow these lines:

(1) The public has created all of the schools to serve the public welfare.

(2) From earliest colonial times public policy has supported all of these schools to some extent--the private as well as the public.

(3) Today's schools, all of them, public and private, taken as a body, constitute a single social entity serving a single public need--the education of our children.

(4) In a pluralistic society which recognizes and intends to serve the needs of a diverse population, there is a legitimate need for a variety of educational institutions and programs to meet diverse needs.

(5) Establishing and maintaining such a national educational establishment is an enormously complicated and expensive undertaking.

(6) Meeting the public need at a satisfactory level requires the pooling and the most constructive utilization of all of the nation's educational resources, public and private -- personnel, plant, funds, and professional know-how.

(7) The standard by which we measure public education policies and judge proposals for educational reform should be simply this, for all schools: On the basis of all available evidence, does this policy contribute to the best utilization of the nation's total educational resources to meet the public need.

Such an approach to educational reform would tend to encourage a shift from confrontation to collaboration; from emotionally loaded and factually dubious assumptions to a calmer search for facts; from current confusion about the resources available to support the nation's schools and how they might best be used to a clearer understanding of the current resource contributions made by the public and private sectors to the public welfare and a more constructive consideration of their best utlization in the future; from extravagent charges and claims and comparisons concerning the performance of public and private schools to more thoughtful, less defensive analyses of strengths and weaknesses and an increased effort identify the "transportable" elements which improve school effectiveness.

There is a fundamental social truth in what I am suggesting, I believe. And the recognition and acceptance of that truth would have a significant psychological impact, I am convinced, upon the way in which scholars and practitioners and policy makers and governmental agencies and the media and the general public would address the formation of public education policy and the consideration of educational reform. The perspectives of public and private schools toward educational reform would still, for the legitimate reasons I have suggested, be different. But the perception by those involved that they had a mutually beneficial stake in the outcome of reform efforts would constitute a major change in their perceptions, and this change would be reflected in a major change in their perspectives on educational reform.

Accepting this rationale, I propose, in outline, this agenda for action:

(1) Subject the concept I have proposed to careful scrutiny, addressing particularly those aspects which are more likely to be disputed by confrontationally oriented advocates of public and private schools.

(2) If it holds up under such scrutiny, launch a coordinated and long-term effort to promote the idea by appropriate means in the profession, in government, and in society.

(3) Undertake, simultaneously, a coordinated study which will create sound information in the following categories--systematically addressing, in the process, the principal issues which have been argued with heat, but seldom with adequate information, during the public policy debates of the last three decades, and longer:

   (a) Comparable descriptive data about public and private school--students, teachers, programs, and resources of all kinds, among others. Information needed to determine the character, condition, and potential contribution of the schools to the national educational effort.

   (b) Scholarly, practitioner-supporter, analysis of educational effectiveness--instructional methods, curricular offerings, administrative organizations, student services, special purpose facilities, utilization of technologies, and resource allocation, among others. Information needed to judge outcomes and identify valuable "transportable" elements for the improvement of the schools, public and private.

   (c) Relational data concerning the necessarily interrelated roles of schools--public and public, private and private, and public and private. Information needed to bring thorughness and balance to a literature which provides considerable insight on the interrelationships of various types of public schools; virtually none on the interrelationships of the highly diverse conglomeration of private schools; and little unbiased consideration of the interrelationships of public and private schools.

   (d) Relational data concerning the necessarily interrelated roles of public and private schools and their communities. Information needed to construct public policy which addresses the ultimate question of how public and private resources can be best utilized to meet the public need.

(4) Develop an informed national agenda for educational reform which is directed at the most effective use of all available educational resources, public and private, to meet the public need.

(5) Pursue that agenda conscientiously, consistently, and continually, modifying it as changing conditions require it but striving to approve modifications in the agenda only when it can be clearly demonstrated that it meets our established standard--that on the basis of all available evidence, the proposed modification will contribute to the best utilization of the nation's total educational resources to meet the public need.